

**THE ROOTS OF THE CHURCH
IN ENGLAND**

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THE ROOTS OF THE CHURCH IN ENGLAND

By

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION.

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INTRODUCTION

As one stands in the midst of some National Forest in California and gazes up to the top of a huge Sequoia, questions arise in one's mind as to the age of such a tree, the spread of its branches and the thickness of its trunk. It is a majestic sight and awe-inspiring. Seldom do one's thoughts go below the surface of the earth to consider the roots which make the tree possible, their extent, their origin, or their vigor. And yet, without the roots, that which we see and admire above the ground could have no life.

If one were a horticulturalist examining a grove of citrus trees, almost the first thought that would come to mind would be "what is the root-stock." All successful orchard and fruit bearing trees must be grafted upon a root-stock which, while related, can never be its own. Otherwise the tree does not come true to type, and its fruit is unpredictable.

It is with these two thoughts in mind that this paper is written. Its purpose is to examine the roots of the Church of England seeking to find how widespread they were and from conflicting testimony to sort out the evidence which best seems to indicate of what kinds they

were. It may be that in finding the answers, or at any rate the suggested answers to these questions, some light may be thrown on questions which have long been subjects of controversy in the Church itself. These controversies have all sought to maintain the independence of the Church of England in its relation with the Bishop of Rome, and have appealed to this very matter of origins to maintain their positions.

In controversy there is always the temptation to ignore evidence which is apparently against the chosen position. This has been the case in many of the authorities which have been examined in the preparation of this thesis. Gray, for example, says, "Christianity was brought into Britain by Joseph of Arimathaea, circ. A.D. 36-39; that a little later Aristobulus became a Bishop among the Britons; and that St. Paul too went there in person. Perhaps also Simon Zelotes and others."¹ This is obviously a deliberate disregard of easily available records on the other side. This is not history, but special pleading and dangerous to the whole position he wishes to maintain. For, if this be his attitude toward evidence which has been generally discarded by historians, though noted by them, one hesitates to accept his

¹ Andrew Gray, The Origin and Early History of Christianity in Britain (New York: James Pott and Co., 1897), p. 3.

conclusions for the position which he is upholding.

Collins², on the other hand, is apt to agree with Wakeman, Bede and others in recognizing the fact of a British Church rather early, possibly by the end of the third century, but dismisses it as being of small consequence to the later history of Christianity in England. Their argument lies largely in the fact that the invasion of the Angles, Saxons and Jutes drove back the British Christians into the western portions of the island where they maintained a somewhat determined state of isolation in all dealings with the invaders.³ This position, however, leaves unaccounted for many phenomena which can only find a logical explanation in the fact that the Christian Church existed, bore witness and perpetuated itself among the Britons after the invasion. To quote Williams:

Within the British portion proper of the island -- among the Celts -- there was the old native Church which, since the Council of Arles (314), or at latest since the time of Theodosius (395) had lived on its life in comparative seclusion. There had been occasional communion with continental Churches, but what the Church of Britain may have possessed of administrative rule

² W. E. Collins, The Beginnings of English Christianity (London: Methuen and Co., 1898), p. 39.

³ The Venerable Bede, The Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1930), p. 32.

was carried on entirely within itself. Many old customs also continued, cherished and revered by all the people in Western parts.⁴

Such phenomena as the vitality of the Church in Ireland and in Scotland outside of the old Roman Empire and outside of the invasion areas of the Germanic tribes must be accounted for in some way. Wakeman points this out when he says:

The mission of St. Ninian in 397, and the foundation by him of a missionary bishopric among the Celts, with its seat in the new stone church and monastery of Whithern in Galloway, stirred up fresh life and formed a centre of missionary work in the extreme northern parts of Roman Britain which had hitherto been little touched by Christianity.⁵

The natural and logical way is to recognize therein the activity of British refugees driven away from their homes.

To quote Wakeman:

The magic of personal influence, not the strength of sturdy institutions, was the inspiring force. Under it grew up in the fifth and sixth centuries a Church, loose and ill-jointed in organization and government, but instinct with personal holiness, inspired by missionary zeal, and imbued with a passion for learning, which was able to keep the torch of the Christian faith alive in the north of Europe amid the torrent of heathen invasion which

⁴ Hugh Williams, Christianity in Early Britain (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1912), p. 439.

⁵ H. O. Wakeman, History of the Church of England (London: Revington's, 1921), p. 4.

was pouring itself forth upon the civilized world.⁶

The main reason for the controversy has been the desire to develop an origin for the English Church which would separate its birth from any connection with the Bishop of Rome, combined with the desire to demonstrate that the Church of England has always been a national and independent Church. To me, the approach has been somewhat a mistaken one and has led to a great many extravagances of statement in the course of the arguments. One needs to refer only to the Canons of the Council of Nicea to find that at the beginning of the fourth century there was no recognition on the part of the Catholic Church of the Bishop of Rome as the sole head of the Church. On the other hand, it must be admitted that this Council did recognize the Bishop of Rome as the patriarch of the Church in the West just as there were patriarchs for Alexandria and Antioch, and later for Jerusalem and Constantinople.

Canon 6. Let the ancient customs in Egypt, Libya, and Pentapolis prevail, that the bishop of Alexandria shall have jurisdiction in all these, since the like is customary for the bishop of Rome also. Likewise in Antioch and the other provinces, let the churches retain their privileges. And this is to be universally understood, that if any one be made bishop without the consent

⁶ Ibid., p. 4.

of his metropolitan, the great synod has declared that such a man ought not to be a bishop.⁷

This was, of course, an administrative relationship granted as a recognition of the distinction of the Sees so named, but it did not convey any of the powers demanded by the Papacy in later centuries, not even the restricted later meaning in the use of the title "Pope."⁸ The power to exact obedience in all matters of faith and practice, the power to impose uniformity of liturgies, the power to speak the last word of truth by right of the occupation of a certain See were all medieval developments. Hence, while it may be necessary to recognize that there was an administrative authority exercised by the Bishop of Rome over the Church in Britain, it does not follow that the Church in Britain was what we would now call a Roman Catholic Church.⁹ Consequently it is possible to put aside any fears in this investigation and endeavor to make an impartial survey of the sources of the Church in England unhampered by the dread

⁷ J. C. Ayer, Jr., A Source Book for Ancient Church History (New York: Chas. Scribner and Sons, 1922), p. 361.

⁸ Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church (New York: Christian Literature Co., 1890), Vol. I, p. 426.

⁹ Ayer, op. cit., p. 238.

of finding it not a national and independent Church but one in schism from its rightful ruler.

Certain sources have not been used for various reasons. In Gildas, as we know him, and Roger Wendover, being late in origin, the historical facts recorded have been so overlaid and mingled with miracles and legends as to make it difficult to separate the wheat from the chaff. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle has been only slightly used because its character as a succession of dates does not lend itself satisfactorily to a study such as this and where more than year dates have appeared, the notations seem to be those of later hands which have been fertile in inventing legends to supplement the rather scanty outline. Some material to which reference has been made in other authors has not been available elsewhere and reference has been made only to citations in those authors. A full list of authorities consulted may be found in the Bibliography at the end of the paper.

CHAPTER II

PREPARING THE SOIL

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Invasion has played an unusually important part in the history of Britain. Even those tribes who gave their name to the island, the Brythones, were invaders upon a territory occupied, presumably, by the Scots and the Picts. As we come closer into the bounds of the recorded history of this island, we learn of the attempted invasion by Julius Caesar in 54 B.C. as recorded in his own book. This, of course, had more the character of a campaign than of the establishment of a settled invasion of the island. In the year 43 A.D., Claudius made the first permanent invasion of the island of Britain by the Romans. This was solidified by Agricola in the succeeding years and resulted in the Roman occupation which lasted more than three hundred and fifty years, until the time the legions were finally recalled, somewhere between 417 and 429, to defend the mother city of Rome against the threatened invasion by the Huns under Attila.

There seems to be considerable difference of opinion as to the cultural results of the Roman occupation. Collingwood¹, for instance, very definitely comes to the

¹ R. G. Collingwood, Roman, Britain and English Settlement, Oxford History of England, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1937), Vol. 1, pp. 176-180.

conclusion that the culture of the Romans was through these years of occupation gradually assimilated by a large number of the inhabitants of Britain. This would be in accord with the Roman colonial policy as evidenced in other examples which we have. The Romans were stern governors but they were just and it was their policy always to develop a country which they occupied for the benefit not only of themselves but also of those whom they ruled. Strangely enough we have very few instances of serious rebellion on the part of a Roman colony against its imperial masters. Collingwood², points out that the indications are that in England after some time had elapsed, the Britons began to think of themselves as colonial citizens of Rome and as being themselves Romans. When we realize that the extension of the occupation was for something around twelve generations, it is impossible to accept the generally accepted idea of the culture of Britain at the time of the withdrawal of the Legions. It was far from being a purely savage and barbarian country as we would gather were we to think only of the reference which Caesar makes in his commentary.

On the other hand there are those such as Oman³

² Ibid., p. 316.

³ Sir Charles Oman, England Before The Norman Conquest, (New York: G. T. Putnam's Sons, 1923), pp. 182-183.

who seem to feel that Roman culture was confined in Britain to a few spots which were the castra where the legions made their headquarters. These, together with an occasional estate or plantation, occupied by some influential citizen, he thinks, were almost the only points on which Roman civilization took root; and that, in the general collapse which followed almost at once upon the withdrawal of the legions, these were destroyed and the general condition of the people reverted to that which it was before the coming of the Romans. Of course this may be true, but it does not seem to be as reasonable as the view of Collingwood. We will, therefore, proceed on the basis that the Roman occupation had left a definite impress upon the culture, the governmental life, and the relations which the Britons had to the whole of the civilized world; that through their own traveling and through the steady stream of visitors and business men from the continental Roman Empire to the island, which was of sufficient importance to be the headquarters for some time for the legate of the Western Empire, there had come to the Britons a large measure of civilization.

In the fifth century, because of pressure upon the Italian peninsula by the Huns and their invading hosts, the legions which, with more or less success, had kept at bay the would-be Germanic invaders of England, were with-

drawn and the island was instructed to rely upon its own resources for its defense. These resources were not sufficient to withstand the fierce attacks and depredations which accompanied the new invasion; and ultimately the Britons, who had been so long protected by their Roman rulers, were forced to yield their most fertile lands to the enemy. It was a dual type of invasion. On the one hand, it was a series of sporadic attacks by piratical bands who swooped upon a settlement, gathered together their booty into boats and fled. On the other hand, and more seriously, it was the result of a definite agreement with fellow-countrymen of these same pirates to become paid defenders against the invaders.⁴ Hengist and Horsa were invited to come to Britain to act as the chief defenders against other marauders from their own and neighboring countries. Having established themselves at the head of the defensive forces, they proceeded to use those forces to make themselves the masters of the island. They then invited others of their fellow-countrymen to come and make it their new home. Could this be an early example of fifth column activity?

Such is a brief sketch of the history of the period of a hundred years which resulted in the driving of

⁴ The Rev. James Ingram, Translator, The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (New York: Dutton and Co., 1912), pp. 25-26.

the Britons out of the more accessible, fertile and populous section of Britain into the wilder portions of Wales, Cornwall and the northwestern shores of the island. Because of the success generally of this invasion, the predominant inhabitants now were Angles and Saxons and they proceeded naturally to call the land by their own name -- Angle-land, or England.

But even with this invasion the Britons were not wiped out. Again Collins⁵ seems to indicate that following this Germanic invasion the Britons or Celts ceased to be of any particular influence or number in the country. In contrast to this, it is of great interest to one who has lived there to observe how, even to this day, the Welsh and the Cornishmen are distinct types of people and are extremely proud of the fact. They are different from the major number of inhabitants of the British Isles, even to the point of maintaining to a great extent the use of different languages in a country which has seen fifteen hundred years, nearly, since the first Angle began to take possession of it. Surely this same tenacity could have withstood an isolation of two hundred years and still kept its Christian faith.

One of the main results of the Germanic invasion

⁵ W. E. Collins, The Beginnings of English Christianity (London: Methuen and Co., 1898), p. 48.

was the severing of most of the connections between England and the Continent. Once again the island passed into almost the same state of isolation as that which preceded the coming of the Roman Legions. And for approximately a century and a half this condition persisted with its attendant effect upon the culture and the internal development of everything that made up the life on the island. It is almost a dark period from an historical point of view because there are few records and they mostly of a legendary character upon which not too much reliance can be placed. Collingwood thus sums up this period:

The period of some two centuries which lies between the collapse of Roman government in Britain and the arrival of St. Augustine has long been recognized as the most difficult and obscure in the history of our country. Yet within it changes more profound and far-reaching than in any other corresponding period took place: and these changes modified the physical character of our people, determined the fundamental structure of our language, laid the basis of many of our institutions, and made possible an economic exploitation of our natural resources on a scale never attempted in prehistoric or even in Roman times.⁶

It was during the period which followed that the territory of England was divided up into seven different kingdoms from which many of the county names of England now come. These kingdoms, apparently, were somewhat patriarchal in form in which the king was a strong chieftain

⁶ Collingwood, op. cit., p. 325.

and mainly of value to his people because of his ability to lead them to victory in war. There were certain governmental functions which began to develop also; a rudimentary form of parliament which was, however, largely consultive rather than legislative, but which did contribute to the later development of the British government. It is important to keep in mind this condition of the Heptarchy as it plays a very important part when Christianity began to make itself felt again throughout the whole of England.

About the ninth century another invasion took place when the Danes, feeling the need of more "lebensraum", began to follow their blood-cousins, the Anglo-Saxons, to England. The character of the invasion was somewhat different because it was primarily an attempt at settlement. It was also true that the Christian Church had played its part in the national life of England by this time, and had produced a rather loose sense of unity which made possible a more successful resistance. In a relatively short time the Danes were being absorbed into the life of the people of England, and peace was cemented by inter-marriage. The acceptance of Christianity was one of the terms of peace.

The final invasion of which we must take note was the Norman Conquest, brought to a successful conclusion

by the battle of Hastings in 1066. Strangely enough the greatest result of the Norman Conquest was to bring England once again under the authority of Rome, but a different Rome from the old one for now the Pope was a ruler, through the Church, of the civil authority as well. The submission of England, of course, was not an immediate result, since William was quite independent of foreign domination, but it was something which took place through the appointment of men imbued with the Roman conception to places of high importance in the government and church in England. From them the Roman idea gradually permeated both church and state and reached its goal by the beginning of the thirteenth century when England once again became very definitely a Roman province, so to remain for another three hundred years.

Such, then, were the soil conditions in which the roots of the Church in England found themselves. Under these different cultural climates they had to grow, draw nourishment and raise where the eyes of men could contemplate a tree which would command their respect and enlist their energies. Failures may appear and weaknesses be recorded, but for the most part they were due not to the roots, but to the environments they had to withstand. And as we proceed, it will appear that so strong was the life within that it overcame the obstacles that beset it, and

by adaptation to its living conditions, as all living things must have, it came into its destiny as the Church of the English speaking people. This it gained not by cutting itself away from the body of the Church Catholic, but by holding fast to those things which were a part of its initial inheritance.

CHAPTER III

THE PLANTING OF THE SEED

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It is impossible for us to say with exactness how, when and by whom Christianity was first introduced into the city of Rome. This is true in spite of the fact that Rome was the center of the civilized world and the capital of the political organization of the Empire. Hence it is not surprising that we should find it difficult to say with certainty by whom or under what conditions the new religion was introduced into Britain. For this was an island at the utmost limits of the Roman Empire where the state of civilization was in no way comparable with that of Rome and where there were no apparently pressing reasons for the keeping of such exact records. In both cases traditions have come down to us as to the person or persons responsible for the introduction of Christianity and in both cases the term 'legendary' may be applied to most of the traditions. It is true, of course, that in the case of Rome, we have historical evidence of more nearly contemporaneous character than we have in Britain, but nothing that is of final authority.

Passing notice must be taken of certain of the traditions which appeared concerning the introduction or the introducers of the new religion into the British Isles.

This does not mean that they should be given entire credence, but rather that there is undoubtedly some germ of truth about the very early appearance of Christianity in England. This has found expression, because of the lack of historical records, in legends which are always dear to the hearts of the people and increasingly dear as they tell of events long removed from days of the teller.

There is, of course, the famous old legend of Glastonbury which records the arrival of Joseph of Arimathea and some of his companions soon after the Crucifixion. Driven from Jerusalem by the ferocity of the persecution which fell upon the Christians under Saul of Tarsus, they came and settled in the Vale of Avalon about the year 36 and there built a wattle church in which Joseph was later buried.¹ In fact, it is said, this legend can be proved by a visit to Glastonbury where there still grows a descendant of the original thorn bush that sprang from the staff which Joseph thrust into the ground and which itself proves the truth of the story by blossoming at Christmas time. Or we have the alternative legend of the visit of St. Paul, nee Saul of Tarsus², who was the instigator of the persecution which gave rise

¹ A. Gray, The Origin and Early History of Christianity in Britain (New York: James Pott and Co., 1897), p. 3.

² Ibid., p. 20.

to the previous legend. This, of course, is based on a rather obscure passage in Paul's own writings (Rom. xv, 28) of his intentions to visit Spain, augmented by a strained interpretation of a reference by St. Clement of Rome to Paul where he speaks "of his having preached Righteousness to the whole world, and having come to the extreme limit of the West."³ Collins⁴ even cites the legend that Peter himself visited Britain and was the one who was responsible for its introduction into that country.

There is also the attempt to connect Pudens and Claudia, two Christians whom St. Paul mentions in his epistle to the Romans, with a poem by Martial in honor of the marriage of a British princess of that name to Pudens, the son of a Roman Senator. Finally, there appears the story of the conversion of the British King Caratacus who was being kept as a hostage in that City⁵. All these are legends which have to do with first century Christianity in Britain and which really will not bear, at any rate in their present form, a careful scrutiny as to their historical exactness. It seems, however, only fair to

³ Ibid., p. 27

⁴ W. E. Collins, The Beginnings of English Christianity (London: Methuen and Co., 1898), p. 25.

⁵ C. A. Lane, Illustrated Notes on English Church History (London: S.P.C.K., 1901), p. 5.

suggest that hidden somewhere among them there lies a grain of truth and, discounting the human tendency to add importance and value to anything they themselves possess, it still is perfectly possible that Christianity found its way into Britain at a time much earlier than present available historical documents would seem to indicate.⁶

Collins refers to the fact that in Gaul, apart from two or three larger centers, Christianity was an extremely rare thing to encounter and that the country was still largely pagan until possibly the beginning of the 4th. century.⁷ From this he deduces the fact that while there would be natural and frequent means of its spread from Gaul to Britain, the source itself being so weak, the results of planting the new religion in Britain must be even weaker than they were at home. Oman has an interesting comment to make on the same subject:

There is no doubt that individual Christians, perhaps even small communities of Christians, were to be found in Britain as early as the second century after Christ, though their proportion to the whole population of the province would seem to have been very small. Even in Gaul it was not large in the age of the Antonines, and only the

⁶ R. G. Collingwood, Roman, Britain and English Settlement, Oxford History of England (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1937), Vol. I, p. 270.

⁷ Collins, op. cit., p. 26

partly-Greek towns of the Rhone Valley contributed martyrs, nearly all with Greek names, to the roll of the victims of M. Aurelius's persecution . . . Yet there is no reason to doubt the statements of Tertullian⁸ -- writing in about 208 A.D. -- or Origen⁹ -- writing in about 230 A.D. -- that the Christian religion had an appreciable number of converts in the remote province of the extreme north-west, although many of its wilder regions may not yet have heard the Gospel preached.¹⁰

He adds:

It is clear that Gaul as a whole was hardly permeated by Christianity till the beginning of the third century, and that Britain was far behind Gaul. But in the long peace for the Christian community which followed the persecution of Severus and lasted practically unbroken till that of Decius and Valerian -- a period of forty years -- the new religion pushed northward and westward with greater power.¹¹

It must not be forgotten that Christianity was a proscribed religion until the Edict of Toleration in the year 312. The official religion and the official worship of the Empire was pagan. Christianity grew and spread rapidly in secret and in opposition to the published edicts of the rulers of the Empire, yet it was very much

⁸ Tertullian, Adv. Jud. vii.

⁹ Origen, Homil. vi., in Luc. l. 24.

¹⁰ Sir Charles Oman, England Before the Norman Conquest (New York: G. T. Putnam's Sons, 1923), p. 177.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 178.

of a minority religion. It must have been perfectly possible to go into communities very close even to the capital of the world and find only a pagan atmosphere and worship unless one knew the secret places of meeting. Consequently, the fact that there were few well-known centers from which Christianity might have spread from Gaul into Britain must not weigh too heavily upon our determination of the fact as to whether it did so spread. Bright¹², indeed, thinks that Gaul was the primary source of early British Christianity, its organization and liturgy.

Another possible source of the beginning of evangelization lay in the Roman legions themselves.¹³ We know that other forms of religion such as Mithraism, very popular with the Roman army, were spread through the Empire by the influence of the Roman forces. How large a proportion of the military or civil establishment in Britain were Christians we, of course, cannot tell, but since the legionnaires were a cross section of the population of the Empire, it is only fair to assume that there must have been some. And, again, if our picture of the enthusiasm of the early Christian converts is a true one, we may be sure that they did not lose an op-

¹² Wm. Bright, Chapters of Early English Church History (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1897), p. 5.

¹³ Collins, op. cit., p. 30.

portunity to speak about their faith to the people in their new surroundings.

It seems fairly reasonable to assume that these two sources, the Roman legions and the frequent communications back and forth across the English Channel with Gaul, were probably the real sources whence Christianity made its earliest appearance in Britain. Of course this does not imply an organized Church or even congregations of worshippers at this time, but it does suggest that there were probably those who were sympathetic and interested and who could be depended upon to be the foci around which groups of people might be organized to form new Christian congregations when opportunity arose and thus lead the way to the more complete organization which we know later existed. Such organization would naturally come from the nearest Church, that is, Gaul.¹⁴ The second century letter of Lucius, supposedly a King of one of the British tribes, to the Bishop of Rome asking for the privilege of baptism seems to be of somewhat doubtful historical validity.¹⁵

By the time we come to the third century there begin to appear references to the Church in Britain and its wide extent in writers who are not at all connected

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 30.

¹⁵ Bright, op. cit., p. 5.

with it. Tertullian¹⁶ makes rather pointed references as does Origen¹⁷ which would indicate that there was a much wider spread of Christianity in Britain than has been generally recognized and at an earlier date. Thus the real existence of the British Church begins to have its witnesses for the first time from those who have no interest in the development of legends but who are writing as impartial observers, if there can be such, of the development of the Christian Church throughout the world. Whatever value we may place on the various legends and traditions which have been cited, it must be clear that by the end of the third century Christianity was rather firmly established and the Church of Britain, while relatively poor as compared with its sister churches in other portions of the Roman Empire, was still recognized by them as belonging to the great Church throughout the world.¹⁸

The Church in Britain was not spared its share of persecution and martyrdom. Notice should be given to that of St. Alban, in the final persecution of Christians

¹⁶ A. W. Haddan and W. Stubbs, (Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents Relating to Great Britain and Ireland (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1869), p. 3.

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 3 and 4.

¹⁸ Collingwood, op. cit., p. 271

under Diocletian, for to him is given the honor of being the first British Christian martyr. However, a careful reading of the account gives the impression that his death was rather a matter of military discipline than one of religious persecution. Still it is true that the guilt of being a Christian was the crime for which punishment was pronounced.¹⁹ On the whole the British Christians fared well in the various persecutions, due largely to the benevolence of the local pro-consuls and the distance from the Imperial City of Rome, but they did not escape unscathed.

¹⁹ The Venerable Bede, The Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation (London: J. E. Dent and Sons, 1930), p. 12.

CHAPTER IV.

THE TREE APPEARS.

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THE TREE APPEARS

With the fourth century, the British Church emerges from its obscurity for a while and takes its part as one of the great group of national churches participating in the Councils called to determine the content of the faith.¹ At the Council of Arles, we find three bishops, a presbyter and a deacon participating in its deliberations. The fact that one of the bishops represented London, one probably Lincoln and another York would indicate that by this time episcopacy had been recognized as the normal method of Church government through practically the whole of the island. It is also interesting to find the three-fold ministry represented. It has been pointed out that the mention of these three names does not preclude the presence of other British bishops at this Council.² Apparently there were no bishops from Britain present at Nicea or at Sardica, (Athanasius, however, suggests their presence at both³), though because

¹ R. G. Collingwood, Roman, Britain and English Settlement, Oxford History of England (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1937), p. 271.

² Sir Charles Oman, England Before the Norman Conquest (New York: G. T. Putnam's Sons, 1923), p. 185.

³ Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church (New York: Christian Literature Co., 1890), Vol. IV. pp. 100 and 279.

of its status as a province of the Catholic Church⁴, the decrees of these Councils were submitted for its approval, which was given.^{5,6} At Ariminum there were British bishops present who, somewhat to the despair of others of the hierarchy, drew the cost of their expenses and transportation from the Emperor rather than accept the offer of their fellow bishops to make up the amount necessary from their own pockets. This incident indicates something of the relative poverty of the British Church as compared to that in the larger centers. It would seem to be forcing a deduction, however, to say that this indicated the smallness of the number of converts in Britain. There are many instances in our own day, shall we say in India, where there are many converts among people of extremely slight means, whose ability to give to the Church is much less than would be the case of a smaller number of converts in a higher economic level.

These facts show that, when the last persecution was over, Christianity emerged in Britain as something widespread in all parts, and in the more civilized regions organized in local communities of the approved type, each presided over by its bishop. They show that

⁴ A. W. Haddan and W. Stubbs, Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents Relating to Great Britain and Ireland (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1869), Vol. I. p. 10.

⁵ Collingwood, op. cit., p. 271.

⁶ Schaff and Wace, op. cit., p. 568.

British Christianity was a recognized part of the general body of such communities, welcome at its councils, and its opinion valued. They show, too, that it was poorer than most of the provincial churches, which implies that as yet it had few adherents among the great men who lived in the villas and in whose hands the wealth of the country was now concentrated. We may picture it as already deeply rooted in the populations of the shrunken and impoverished towns, and making its way by degrees among the peasantry. And (combining Tertullian's⁷ much earlier statement with inferences from the history of much later times) we may conjecture that it had already taken root over much of the high-land zone. Of one thing we may be certain; that the poorer classes among whom it was especially acceptable included, especially outside the towns, considerable numbers whose degree of romanization was very small; people whose names and speech and manners, in spite of three centuries of Roman government, were still prevailingly Celtic.⁸

It has been pointed out that there are relatively few monuments of this early period of the British Church in the archeological discoveries which have been made. This, in turn, has been used as a basis for the opinion that the Church was of insignificant numbers.⁹ Strangely enough those who make this suggestion also point out that there are relatively few secular monuments left from the same period.¹⁰ Several explanations of this are possible,

⁷ Tertullian, Adv. Jud. VII.

⁸ Collingwood, op. cit., p. 272.

⁹ Oman, op. cit., p. 184.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 182.

one being the general poverty that existed in the island, except possibly in certain large centers, which have not been subject to excavation because they are even to-day the sites of great cities. Secondly, the materials which were used in their buildings were probably easily perishable, being mostly wood or, as we have indications, for instance at Canterbury, wattle. A third reason would be the fact that so much of England was subjected to destructive raids at the hands of invaders who not merely took away their booty but burned the towns and the houses which they had to leave behind them. And again, in the fourth place, an analogy could be found in what has happened in many other parts of the world where partially destroyed buildings have been completely razed by those who wanted the remaining material for the purpose of erecting new buildings.¹¹ Hence, this argument 'a silentio' does not seem to prove the point that the British Church was of extremely small numbers. Collingwood's summary of the extent of Christianity is interesting. He says:

Despite the traces of a pagan revival which we have noted as appearing towards the end of the fourth century, it is certain that by this time Christianity had made a good deal of progress in almost every class of British society. It began, as we have seen, among the poorer inhabitants of the towns.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 183.

Although the number of recorded bishops is small, we cannot doubt that every town of any size in Britain had by now its bishop, for the bishop of the early church was not the head of a large territorial diocese, he was simply the head of a Christian community such as every considerable town must have possessed. By the end of the fourth century, the upper classes of society were partly Christianized too.¹²

Such, then, was the picture as we can best reconstruct it, of the British Church as events in another part of the world were shaping which would provide the opportunity for a new blow against the island of Britain. The Westward press of the Huns was forcing Rome to gather together its strength in a vain attempt to stave off the conquest of Italy at their hands.¹³ In pursuance of this object, the fighting forces of the Empire were called in from the outposts which they were holding. This meant that Britain was left without the prestige of the Roman legions which had kept it more or less secure from attack from hostile neighbors in the North of Europe and from the Picts in what is now Scotland. Hardly had the last legion departed when these attacks began from both sides. Because for so many years the Britons had relied on the Roman arms to protect them, they were ill-prepared

¹² Collingwood, op. cit., p. 305.

¹³ The Rev. James Ingram, The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (New York: Dutton and Co., 1912), p. 25.

in leadership and in war-like training to withstand the relentless assaults and it was a relatively short time before they were driven back into the portions of the country which were least accessible to the invading hosts.

All of these events conspired to re-establish the isolation of the British from what had been for four centuries the center of their economic, religious and political life. It was almost as though a curtain had been dropped across the Channel through which only occasional gleams of light or glimpses of events behind it were possible. The Britons, together with their island, sink into obscurity almost unbroken until the end of the sixth century.

But for the two intervening centuries we have no contemporary sources of any sort approaching in value those available for the periods before and after. Such material as we have of a literary kind is moreover rendered more difficult of interpretation by its division into two groups representing the traditions of invaders and invaded.¹⁴

One of the breaks which centered attention for a while on the island was the heresy of Pelagius, a Briton, who, however, caused most of his trouble after he had arrived in Rome. Oman pays this doubtful tribute to the vigor of the British Church:

¹⁴ Collingwood, op. cit., p. 327.

It has been observed, somewhat cynically, that schisms and heresies are proofs rather of the vigour than of the weakness of a Church, and that nothing bears greater testimony to a dearth of true spiritual life than a dead level of orthodoxy. The British Church clearly did not fall under this condemnation, since it produced in the very last days of the Romans a heresiarch, whose teaching not only proved powerful in his own lifetime but maintained its influences for many generations after his death.¹⁵

Pelagius was the originator, or at least the disseminator of the heresy which bears his name and which has a striking resemblance to the extreme form of humanism. It is interesting to note that while Pelagianism was set forth on the continent, it did find a lodgment in Britain. The Britons had apparently developed no scholars or great theologians among their bishops, contrary to the present custom. They were unable to cope with the heresy themselves and so they sought for assistance.¹⁶ In their extremity they turned to Germanus, Bishop of Auxerre, who, with Lupus of Troyes, went to Britain and successfully combatted the heresy.¹⁷

Much is made of the fact that there were many baptisms at the time of this visitation, but it can be

¹⁵ Oman, op. cit., p. 83.

¹⁶ The Venerable Bede, The Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1930), p. 26.

¹⁷ Collingwood, op. cit., p. 30.

over-emphasized.¹⁸ Every parish priest has had the experience that a missionary is able at the conclusion of a successful mission to offer as the fruits thereof many who have been touched by the new manner of presentation or the new personality, but who have been impervious to the voice which they have heard for years. It must also be remembered that it was only the presence of the British Church and its position in the communities where Germanus appeared that gave him the opportunity to present his message which resulted in conversions. Had it not been a recognized part of the life of the Britons, he would have had fewer people to hear his words.

The strength of the British Church is remarkably stated by Oman in spite of the fact that he is not overly impressed by it. He says:

When the Roman State fell, the Christian Church was the only living power left in the West, and seems to have completed, in those years of chaos and misery that make up the fifth century, the conversion of the heathen remnant. Christianity was a better religion for those who had to suffer and endure than moribund polytheism. And the Church supplied the sole organization around which the Romanized provincials could rally, when the State had been destroyed. Who could have faced the incoming Frank or Saxon with inspiration drawn from the worn-out faith of Mars and Jupiter?¹⁹

¹⁸ Bede, op. cit., p. 26.

¹⁹ Oman, op. cit., p. 185.

Such a Church was no weak sapling but a sturdy growth, having within it the vitality to withstand the blasts that were to be unloosed upon it. As it enters the period of historical darkness, it is an influence in the land, a part of the recognized life of the people of Britain. How it survived the tempest, how it again spread out its branches, how it transmitted its special spiritual gifts to a later generation will be discussed in a later chapter.

CHAPTER V

PATRIARCH OR POPE

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PATRIARCH OR POPE

A number of references to the Bishop of Rome, or the Pope, will be made in the succeeding chapters. Since the relationship which existed between the Church in Britain and the See of Rome during the period under consideration has been a matter of much debate, it seems well to examine what testimony is offered by contemporaneous writers. It is, of course, true that it was the same relationship as existed between the See of Rome and other established churches under their own bishops.

But it is also true that there were different grades of bishops, not distinctions in the office itself, but reflections of the importance of the see over which they presided or the functions which they exercised. Schaff's explanation of this is worth quoting:

Though the bishops were equal in their dignity and powers as successors of the apostles, they gradually fell into different ranks, according to the ecclesiastical and political importance of their several districts. On the lowest level stood the bishops of the country churches, the chor-episcopi, who though not mentioned till the fourth century, probably originated at an earlier period. Among the city bishops again, the metropolitans rose above the rest; that is, the bishops of the capital cities of provinces. They presided in the

provincial synods, and, as *primi inter pares*, ordained the bishops of the province. The metropolitan system appears, from the Council of Nicea in 325, to have been already in operation, and was afterwards more fully carried out in the East. In North Africa the oldest bishop, hence called *senex*, stood as *primus*, at the head of his province; but the bishop of Carthage enjoyed the highest consideration, and could summon general councils.^{1*}

For administrative purposes on a wide scale, the Empire was divided into several large groups or patriarchates of which the head was the bishop of the most important diocese. There was apparently no question of one of the patriarchs being superior to the others. Schaff referring to them says:

In the time of Irenaeus and Tertullian they were held in the highest regard, as the chief bearers of the pure church tradition. Among these Antioch, Alexandria, and Rome were most prominent, because they were the capitals respectively of the three divisions (Later five divisions, H.V.H.) of the Roman empire, and centres of trade and intercourse, combining with their apostolic origin the greatest political weight.²

However, this does not mean that there was no tendency on the part of the Roman bishops from time to time to claim authority over the other bishops and provinces of the Church. That their claim met with opposition can

¹ Philip Schaff, History of the Christian Church (New York: Chas. Scribner and Sons, 1870), Vol. I, p. 425.

* See also page 5 above.

² Ibid., p. 426.

be gathered from the following quotation from Ayer:

In the middle of the third century there were in sharp conflict two distinct and opposed theories of Church unity: the theory that the unity was based upon adherence to and conformity with the see of Peter; and the theory that the episcopate was itself one, and that each bishop shared equally in it. The unity was either in one see or in the less tangible unity of an order of the hierarchy. The former was the theory of the Roman bishops; the latter, the theory of Cyprian of Carthage, and possibly of a number of other ecclesiastics in North Africa and Asia Minor.³

In arriving at this position, he cites among others Cyprian, who was possibly the most outspoken of his time in opposition. He says, "For neither does any one of us set himself up as a bishop of bishops, nor by tyrannical terrors does any one compel his colleagues to the necessity of obedience."⁴ And in another place:

Let no one deceive the brotherhood by a falsehood; let no one corrupt the truth by a perfidious prevarication. The episcopate is one, each part of which is held by each one in its entirety. The Church, also, is one which is spread abroad far and wide into a multitude by an increase of fruitfulness. As there are many rays of the sun, but one light, and many branches of a tree, but one strength based upon its tenacious root.⁵

³ J. C. Ayer, Jr., A Source Book for Ancient Church History (New York: Chas. Scribner and Sons, 1922), p. 238.

⁴ Ibid., p. 240.

⁵ Ibid., p. 242.

Upon this position of Cyprian, Bethune-Baker makes the following comment:

The theory of the Church which Cyprian laid down became, if it was not already at the time at which he wrote, normal for the West; and no Latin writing on the subject calls for notice till fresh circumstances called forth a fresh expression of the theory from Augustine.⁶

and, "The later theory, which would see the centre of unity in the Papacy, can claim little general support in the earlier ages with which we have to do."⁷

The test of apostolicity was communion with the episcopate. This is the general tenor of writers of the Early Church, not communion with Rome.⁸ This is true throughout the patristic teaching and especially true in that of Augustine. His appeal is not to a single see, but to the whole Church which possesses the historical episcopate.⁹ An interesting proof of this position of Stone's is found in his statement based on Puller:¹⁰

In the troubled times and external divi-

⁶ J. F. Bethune-Baker, Introduction to the Early History of Christian Doctrine, (London: Methuen and Co., 1903), p. 366.

⁷ Ibid., p. 375.

⁸ Darwell Stone, Outlines of Christian Dogma (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1907), p. 119.

⁹ Ibid., p. 120.

¹⁰ Puller, The Primitive Saints and the See of Rome.

sions of the fourth and fifth centuries there were Easterns and Gallicans who lived and died out of communion with the See of Rome who are now recognized saints of the Church.¹¹

Stokes, in writing of the work of Patrick and the leaders of the Celtic and Scottish Churches, brings out the contrast between the modern and the ancient attitude toward the Papacy. So clear is his statement that it is worth recording here:

People who read Church history through the spectacles of the nineteenth century are very apt to fancy that the pope occupied then for the whole Western Church the same position as he does now in the Roman Communion. The Congregation De propaganda Fide now controls the whole missionary activity of that Church. No faithful son thereof would dream of starting any important missionary work without the sanction and support of that body, and through it of the pope; and that sanction is not easily given But at the beginning of the fifth century it was not so. The pope then neither exercised the control nor received the reverence afterwards yielded to him. The bishops of the province of North Africa flouted the claim of the same Pope Coelestine who is said to have sent St. Patrick, when he attempted to exercise supremacy over the province of Africa. Columba never sought papal sanction for the conversion of the Picts, St. Columbanus for the conversion of the Germans and Swiss. Metropolitan and provincial jurisdiction and rights were then respected. Each province claimed, as Africa did, the right to manage its own affairs, and to

¹¹ Stone, op. cit., p. 121.

convert the heathen in its own neighbourhood.¹²

Even Gregory himself, in his Epistle LXVIII, objects to the use of the term "universal bishop."¹³ It is true that he is writing in opposition to a claim of John of Constantinople to use this title, and in the course of the letter he inferentially claims the right to determine the relationship of other bishops, to whom he is writing, to John. But one sentence is particularly significant as to the status at this time of the later papal idea when he says, "For if one, as he supposes, is universal bishop, it remains that you are not bishops."¹⁴

It was this same Gregory who wrote, in answer to questions of Augustine of Canterbury about differences in liturgies and customs, the following words:

You know, my brother, the custom of the Roman church in which you remember you were bred up. But it pleases me, that if you have found anything, either in the Roman, or the Gallican, or any other church, which may be more acceptable to Almighty God, you carefully make choice of the same, and sedulously teach the church of the English, which as yet is new in the faith, whatsoever you can gather from the several churches.

¹² George T. Stokes, Ireland and the Celtic Church (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1892), p. 49.

¹³ Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church (New York: Christian Literature Co., 1890), Vol. XIII, p.18.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 19

For things are not to be loved for the sake of places, but places for the sake of good things. Choose, therefore, from every church those things that are pious, religious, and upright, and when you have, as it were, made them up into one body, let the minds of the English be accustomed thereto.¹⁵

These are not the words of one who is safely settled in the authority of the papacy as it was developed through the Middle Ages.

Collins¹⁶ sums up the matter when he writes:

'The power of the Papacy' in the sense of later days, was, of course, a thing entirely unknown to the early British Church, as it was to the rest of the Church Catholic. But as the Abbe Duchesne has said,¹⁷ the Church of Roman Britain occupied precisely the same position with regard to the Roman See as did the Gallican Church or the Spanish. What then did this mean? It certainly did not mean that they regarded it as the source of their spiritual life, or that the word that came from Rome was law to them. But they revered it and deferred to it as the first see of the West, and indeed of all Christendom. For in the graves of the Apostles Peter and Paul it had memories more sacred for them than any outside the Holy Land. Moreover, the Bishop of Rome shone with the reflected glory of his city, the centre of the world, to which, on account of its greater pre-eminence the faithful from every quarter of

¹⁵ Bede, The Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation, (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1930), p. 39.

¹⁶ W. E. Collins, The Beginnings of English Christianity (London: Methuen and Co., 1898), p. 21.

¹⁷ Eglises Separees, p. 12.

necessity resorted.¹⁸

If such be a correct picture, as it seems to be, the greatest obstacle to giving a true value to the work of the different elements of the early Church in Britain disappears. And, having cleared this ground, we can proceed to a consideration of the processes which were under way, moving toward the climax which would bear fruit in the Church of the English.

¹⁸ S. Iren. adv. Haer. lib. 111. c.3.

CHAPTER VI

THE WORK OF AUGUSTINE

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The coming of Augustine to Britain in 597 has been heralded as the beginning of the conversion of England.¹ It would be more accurate to call it a missionary expedition to the Kingdom of Kent.² It was not a venture into hostile territory. Augustine came as the result of a marriage. Aethelbert of Kent had married Bertha, daughter of Charibert, King of Paris, a Christian, and had accepted the condition that she be allowed to take her chaplain, Luidhardt, former Bishop of Senlis, with her to her new home.³ Augustine there found a welcome prepared which might not otherwise have awaited him.

On his arrival, he was received by the king who placed an ancient church at his disposal, listened to his preaching and instruction, and finally decided to accept the Christian religion.⁴ This was the signal, as had been true earlier in Rome on the baptism of Constantine, and later was to be true in the other kingdoms of

¹ Bede, The Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1930), p. 33.

² Ibid., p. 35.

³ H. O. Wakeman, History of the Church of England (London: Revington's, 1921), p. 9.

⁴ Bede, op. cit., p. 37.

Britain, for the nobles, leaders and people, to follow the king and accept the new religion. Such mass movements of people from one form of Christianity to another were not unknown at a still later date during the rapid shifting from camp to camp which took place during the Reformation Period on the continent.

Following the success of his mission, Augustine returned to Gaul where he was consecrated "Bishop of the Angles" by Vergilius of Arles and Aetherius of Lyons.⁵ This was on November 16, 597. In the year 601, Gregory, Patriarch of the Western Church through the force of the Canons of Nicea, appointed Augustine to be the Metropolitan and Archbishop of the English. At the same time he sent the pallium or pall as a mark of distinction and honor.⁶ This gift, and its reception, was later interpreted to imply that both the Bishop of Rome and Augustine recognized the supremacy of Gregory over the English Church. The following quotation from Collins seems to answer this position:

There are in my opinion some points in the history and use of the pallium which still call for study, and on which fuller light may yet be thrown. But it would carry us too far afield to enter

⁵ Wakeman, op. cit., p. 12

⁶ W. E. Collins, The Beginnings of English Christianity (London: Methuen and Co., 1898), p. 186 and 187.

at length into the history of the pallium here; and it does not really concern our purpose. Whatever Gregory may have meant by it, it is quite clear that he meant something different from what Paschal II. or Leo XIII. would mean by it, and that the thing itself was in his day (so far as the West was concerned) a novelty of little more than a century in age.⁷

At the same time there arrived some priests⁸ as assistants who brought with them certain letters to Augustine from Gregory which apparently are in answer to questions asked. Bede quotes them in full. The following extracts seem to have bearing on our particular subject:

Choose, therefore, from every church those things that are pious, religious, and upright, and when you have, as it were, made them up into one body, let the minds of the English be accustomed thereto.⁹

As for the church of England, in which you are as yet the only bishop, you can no otherwise ordain a bishop than in the absence of other bishops; unless some bishops should come over from Gaul, that they may be present as witnesses to you in ordaining a bishop.¹⁰

If it shall therefore happen, my brother, that you go over into the province of France, you are to concert with the said bishop of

⁷ Ibid., p. 185.

⁸ Wakeman, op. cit., p. 13.

⁹ Bede, op. cit., p. 39.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 41.

Arles, how, if there be any faults among the bishops, they may be amended.¹¹

For they did not keep Easter Sunday at the proper time, but from the fourteenth to the twentieth moon; which computation is contained in a revolution of eighty-four years.¹²

There came also from Gregory instructions to meet with the bishops of the British Church,¹³ and to try and establish an understanding with them which would bring into effect a union of forces for the work of evangelizing the heathen Germanic tribes which had over-run the island. This Augustine proceeded to do.¹⁴ However, from all accounts that survive, it would seem that he had little understanding of the mental processes of men such as those who were leaders of the British.

But unfortunately, neither Gregory nor Augustine seemed in the least to understand the difficulties which the policy involved. Coming directly from Rome, and conscious of the superior culture of Roman Christianity, rich with six hundred years of imperial and apostolic tradition, Augustine looked upon the remnants of the Celtic Church among the hills of Cornwall, Wales and Strathclyde, and the Irish missions among the islands of Western Scotland, much as the educated Englishman is now apt to look upon the Christian communities of the stagnant east. He found

¹¹ Ibid., p. 42.

¹² Ibid., p. 65.

¹³ Wakeman, op. cit., p. 14

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 17.

them in many respects behind the times. They lacked the orderly organization familiar to those who had been trained under the influence of Roman law and method. They still clung to observances which the Roman Church had grown out of a hundred years ago.¹⁵

It is not surprising that such should have been the case. It is only necessary to recall that St. Paul himself had a very definite pride in the fact that he was a Roman citizen by birth in contrast to him that had obtained it with a great price, to perceive something of the attitude of the monk from Rome, with all its traditions of ancient glory, as he met with the possibly uncouth, certainly uncultured, men from Cornwall and Wales. But it was unfortunate.

Two meetings were held. Both were failures so far as the immediate objects were concerned. But more than that, there was engendered an antagonism which made it impossible for Augustine to deal further with the British bishops. All returned to their own districts to pursue their own methods of teaching and propagating the faith.

Such things as these appeared to the somewhat narrow mind of Augustine as relics of barbarism and ignorance, which must at once be swept away before the enlightenment of Rome and the authority of the pope. He did not realize that he was dealing with a persecuted branch of a great Church of the north-west which might well claim to meet even the Church of the west

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 15.

on terms of equality. For more than a hundred years it might well be said that Catholic Christendom had been divided into three great sections -- the Church of the east, with its centre at Constantinople, the Church of the west, with its centre at Rome, and the Church of the north-west, with its centre in Ireland. With much of barbarism, with much of undisciplined heroism, this Church of the north-west had developed wholly apart from the influence of Rome, and unaffected for good or evil by its culture or its law.¹⁶

Augustine turned again to his prime interest in Kent, and the establishment of the Church in that kingdom. This he did with great success, consecrating Justus as Bishop of Rochester, that he might have episcopal assistance, and sending Mellitus as bishop to revive the ancient see of London. This latter mission had a very short existence, and was later re-established from the Scottish Church.

Augustine died in 604, leaving behind him a work well done.¹⁷ So well, in fact, that it was able to withstand the reaction that came after the death in 616 of Aethelbert, his protector and benefactor. For a time it seemed that heathenism would again gain control of Kent under Eadbald, the new king, but this was short lived,¹⁸ the Church stood fast, and Canterbury, the seat of Augus-

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 16.

¹⁷ R. G. Collingwood, Roman, Britain and English Settlement. Oxford History of England (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1937, Vol. I., p. 437.

¹⁸ Wakeman, op. cit., p. 19.

tine's first church, has ever since been the center from which the affairs of the Church of England have been administered.¹⁹

One other mission which had its rise in Kent should also be mentioned in connection with the work of Augustine, the mission to Northumbria. This, too, was the result of a marriage.²⁰ This time the daughter of Bertha, who had been responsible for the coming of Augustine, married Edwin. Again there was a condition that the bride should be allowed to follow her religion, which was, of course, Christian.²¹ Paulinus was consecrated bishop and accompanied her (626), and in a relatively short time the story of Kent was repeated. The king, his councillors and then the common people of the kingdom became Christians. The see of York was re-established, as was that of Lincoln. Another strong center was being planted from which the Church might spread out into other kingdoms.

But it was short-lived. King Penda of Mercia, seeing in the spread of Christianity a threat to his own religion and gods, made war, was victorious, killed Edwin in battle and proscribed Christianity within the boundar-

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 30.

²⁰ C. A. Lane, Illustrated Notes on English Church History (London: S.P.C.K., 1901), p. 58.

²¹ Wakeman, op. cit., p. 19.

ies of Northumbria.²² Paulinus fled with the queen and her child to Kent,²³ where he became Bishop of Rochester,²⁴ and the promising new diocese ceased to be, with the exception of a single deacon who remained, teaching the people the Gregorian chants and waiting for brighter days to come. But when they came, they came from Scotland, not from Kent.

Two other kingdoms owed their conversion to Roman missions, those of East Anglia and Wessex. The first, with Sigberct as king, received Felix for their first bishop.²⁵ He came with letters from the Bishop of Rome to Honorius of Canterbury (630) explaining the conditions under which he was sent. Interestingly enough he had as an aide Furse, a Scot, who came with some companions to help him.²⁶ This is the first instance of active co-operation between a Roman mission and the Celtic Church in the conversion of the Angles, and it was a most successful one.

Birinus was the name of the monk consecrated bishop who undertook to convert Wessex.^{27,28} Again a marriage,

²² Ibid., p. 23.

²³ Lane, op. cit., p. 61.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 62.

²⁵ Wakeman, op. cit., p. 21.

²⁶ Lane, op. cit., p. 63.

²⁷ Wakeman, op. cit., p. 22.

²⁸ Lane, op. cit., p. 66.

this time that of Oswald of Northumbria with the daughter of Cynegils, provided a favorable setting for his work. Once more the same pattern was followed, the king was converted, and after him the people. This later became one of the strongholds of Christianity for the whole of the island.

Thus far we can give credit to missions from Rome for the conversion of those who drove out the ancient British Church. Except as noted they had no help from their predecessors who held aloof. But the British Church was far from extinct. In the following chapter some record will be presented of its preparation and share in the final spread of Christianity through the remaining kingdoms. Neither side had need to be ashamed of its accomplishments. Each had a very necessary contribution to make to the future Church of England. From the vantage point of the time in which we live, it seems a matter for regret that their forces could not have been joined at the beginning and the task completed sooner.

CHAPTER VII

THE CELTIC STRAIN

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St. Patrick is probably the most famous of a group of men who for the next two centuries played a large part in the history of the Church in Ireland and Britain.¹ It is a strange thing that so little is known definitely about his life in view of his fame. That he was born of a Christian family, that his father was a deacon in the Christian Church and at the same time a minor official in the Roman government, that his grandfather was a Christian priest, are the only facts of his early life that are known with assurance.² We do not know when he was born or where. Professor Stokes, in his interesting book "Ireland and the Celtic Church" makes the suggestion that there were a number of men through a century or more to whom was given the title "Patricius" who were active in the Christian Church in Ireland and that when fame centered on one of them the acts of all were attributed to this particular person.³

¹ R. G. Collingwood, Roman, Britain and English Settlement. Oxford History of England (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1937), Vol. I., pp.310,311.

² George T. Stokes, Ireland and the Celtic Church (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1892), p. 39.

³ Ibid., p. 47.

We do know that he was taken as a captive to Ireland by a raiding party of Scots, that he made his escape and later found his way to Gaul where he studied for the priesthood and in the year 432 returned to Ireland having been consecrated bishop to shepherd the Scots in that island, and, possibly, commissioned by Bishop Celestine of Rome.⁴ There is strong evidence that he returned to the same territory where he had been held captive and by conversion of the tribal chief succeeded in winning the Scots of that locality to Christianity. This, of itself, would have been of interest but of slight importance in the history of the British Church, had it not been that from the Scots so converted there later came the man who was to be the inspiration for another wave of missionary leaders among the Anglo-Saxons.

In 563, Colomba, a Scottish Christian banished from Ireland, sought out and obtained the little island of Iona just off the Western coast of Scotland.^{5,6} There he founded a monastery which became a center for missionary work among the Picts, and from which most of the kingdoms of

⁴ Ibid., p. 47.

⁵ H. Williams, Christianity in Early Britain (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1912), pp. 440-41.

⁶ The Rev. James Ingram, Translator, The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (New York: Dutton and Co., 1912), p. 30.



England were converted to Christianity.⁷ From it, in turn, under the leadership of Aidan, grew up on the Eastern coast the monastery of Lindisfarne,⁸ about the year 635. From these two centers there went out a spirit of piety and learning which gradually attracted the attention of many of the noble families of the kingdoms of England. To them were sent their sons for education, not in religion, but in the finer arts of civilization, but with these they learned the impelling force of the Christian faith which caused their teachers to give their lives to such a cause.⁹

From this association and in a natural way, the younger generation, when they returned to their homes, took with them the conviction, to a greater or less degree, of the truth to be found in the principles of Christianity. As they succeeded to the places of power and influence in their kingdoms, we find that one by one these kingdoms sent a request to Iona or Lindisfarne that a bishop might be sent them to teach the Christian faith to the people of their kingdom.¹⁰ It is true that

⁷ Bede, The Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation (London: J. E. Dent and Sons, 1930), p. 108.

⁸ Ibid., p. 110.

⁹ C. A. Lane, Illustrated Notes of English Church History (London: S.P.C.K., 1901), p. 64.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 65.

this missionary effort was made after the landing of Augustine in Kent, but it is also true that it was in fields and kingdoms which were largely unaffected by the Augustinian mission which was confined almost entirely to the single kingdom in which it started.

Collins¹¹ says:

It is, of course, perfectly true that a very large part of England -- possibly the larger part -- was converted from the north. And (always remembering how loose a significance must be given to the words italicised) it is the fact that 'the whole of England, except Kent, East Anglia, Wessex and Sussex, was at the beginning of A.D. 664, attached to the Scottish Communion, and Wessex was under a Bishop, Wine, ordained in Gaul, and in communion with British Bishops.¹² Sussex was still heathen. So that Kent and East Anglia alone remained completely in communion with both Rome and Canterbury.'¹³

One of the first fruits, among the Anglo-Saxons, of the monastery at Iona, was the reclaiming of Northumbria for Christianity. We have already noticed in the preceding chapter the promising but too brief work of Paulinus in that field destroyed by the invasion of Penda of Mercia. Shortly Oswald, who had been converted

¹¹ W. E. Collins, The Beginnings of English Christianity (London: Methuen and Co., 1898), p. 79.

¹² As to these British Bishops, see post, p. 84.

¹³ Haddan and Stubbs, III. p. 106, note a.

to Christianity at Iona, became the king.^{14,15} He turned to Iona for teachers. After one misfit had been sent and returned, Aidan was consecrated bishop in 635.¹⁶ He founded the monastery at Lindisfarne, an island given him by the King, and from there the Celtic customs and the rule of Iona were introduced through much of Britain.¹⁷

When Peada, son of Penda, became king of a part of Mercia, he sought to establish peace with Northumbria by marrying the daughter of Osevy its king. However, once again there was a condition to the marriage, that she be allowed to continue her religion.¹⁸ This resulted in the conversion of Peada, and in 653 Diuna was consecrated by the Scots and sent to Mercia.¹⁹

Thirty-seven years after the East Saxons had lapsed to heathenism, Sigberct, their king, was converted to Christianity during his visits to Northumbria. He sent to Lindisfarne for missionaries for his people. As a result Cedd was sent to London and consecrated bishop

¹⁴ Lane, op. cit., p. 64.

¹⁵ Bede, op. cit., p. 106.

¹⁶ H. O. Wakeman, History of the Church of England (London: Revington's, 1921), p. 24.

¹⁷ Lane, op.cit., p. 66.

¹⁸ Bede, op. cit., p. 137.

¹⁹ Lane, op. cit., p. 69.

in 654.²⁰ From that time there was no further return to the worship of heathen gods.²¹ With the conversion of Sussex in 681, under the guidance of Wilfrid, the conversion of the seven kingdoms was complete. Wilfrid also had been trained at Lindisfarne. However, he had travelled on the continent and was much impressed by the necessity of conformity to the practices of the Western Church.²² He was the storm center of a controversy which later led to that conformity.²³

Strangely enough, and yet naturally, there were the same points of difference which characterized these Scottish missions as were found in the Celtic Church with which Augustine came into contact. The date of Easter, the method of tonsure, the form of baptism, all were the same as these which Augustine found so terrible. And yet the explanation is simple. It was no desire to maintain an idiosyncrasy, no desire to be stubborn, not even was it an evidence, though some think to the contrary, of a close connection with the Church in the East. It was merely the result of the fact that the Celtic and the

²⁰ Bede, op. cit., p. 139.

²¹ Lane, op. cit., p. 71

²² Wakeman, op. cit., p. 31.

²³ Lane, op. cit., p. 72.

Scottish Churches had been shut away from practically all communication with continental Christianity for a period of nearly 150 years and that during this 150 years certain changes had come about on the Continent with which the island Churches were not familiar. They, therefore, held to their original method of procedure. Naturally, they resented an outsider's preemptory demand that they alter customs which had been hallowed by centuries of use among them without giving a reasonable explanation for the change.

However, some of the difficulties introduced by the coming of the Augustinian and other Roman missions in the South and Southeast of Britain were brought to a conclusion by the Council of Whitby in 664. This Council was called primarily to settle the matter of the date of Easter. The Celtic and Scottish missions were celebrating it at one time, the Roman at another. Much confusion resulted and it was the cause of much discord. The arguments advanced by either side were not historical, but an agreement was reached which was the important thing.²⁴

Williams says:

From the year 603 there were two churches in Britain, the old British, the new Roman. That chasm which separated them was first of all made by the precipitate

²⁴ Wakeman, op. cit., p. 32.

action of the very missionary who had been the first to bring the faith in Christ to the Saxons.²⁵

Wakeman writes of the Council of Whitby:

Colman, if he had known his case, could have demolished Wilfrid's appeal to the decisive authority of St. Peter as easily as Wilfrid demolished his appeal to the decisive authority of St. John. Both were equally unhistorical. But behind the arguments used lay the real questions which were involved -- isolation or unity, law or chaos, culture or ignorance, progress or backwardness.²⁶

This Council was more than the solution of certain problems of usage and custom which had resulted in a divided presentation of Christianity in Britain. It had its positive side. The decision at Whitby became a uniting force which tended to bring what we might almost call the native Churches, that is the Celtic and Scottish, into active co-operation with the later mission or missions for a common purpose, the evangelization of Britain. This was further cemented and solidified by the adoption of canons at the Council of Hertford in 673 which Wakeman calls the first provincial council of the Church of England.²⁷

²⁵ Williams, op. cit., p. 441.

²⁶ Wakeman, op. cit., p. 33.

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 36-7.

This unification of purpose did not mean that peace and harmony had descended upon the two groups or that there was perfect unity between them. A number of years passed before this could be accomplished, and it was largely the result of the introduction of a new figure into England, Theodore, Archbishop of Canterbury, consecrated for this office in 668. Strangely enough, the contest between Wilfrid and Theodore was a strong influence in bringing it about.

The part played by Wilfrid in the decision at Whitby about the date of Easter was only a part of his contribution to the unification of the two Churches in England, and to the consciousness of its own independence in administration. However, it must be admitted, that this latter result was unwitting on his part. Wilfrid had been chosen Bishop of Lindisfarne, but, arranging to be consecrated on the continent, he left the diocese without episcopal supervision. Disturbed by this, the people requested and received another bishop, Chad, in his place. On his return, Wilfrid accepted the situation and retired to Ripon.²⁸

On the arrival of Theodore in 669, he examined this case and ruled that Wilfrid was the rightful bishop. Chad immediately withdrew from the diocese. However, a little later Theodore proposed to divide Wilfrid's dic-

²⁸ Ibid., p. 34.

cese, and without his consent consecrated three new bishops for portions of it.²⁹ Wilfrid immediately appealed to the Pope and went to Rome. This was not an acknowledgment of supremacy of the Roman Bishop over the English Church, but an appeal to impartial mediation.³⁰ The appeal was successful, but when the answer was presented to the King, Witan, and Archbishop they refused to accept it and first imprisoned, then banished Wilfrid.³¹ After his release he undertook a successful mission to Sussex.

In 687, a reconciliation was effected with Theodore, and Wilfrid was restored to his old diocese. But three years later, after the former's death, he was banished again and became Bishop of Leicester. Reconciliation was attempted once more at Easterfield in 702, but without success.

It was not that the Northumbrian kings and clergy were wanting in respect or reverence for the see of Rome. They were willing to listen to the counsels of the pope with all due deference. But they could not forgive the English bishop who, despising his own national institutions, sought to bring them under the control of

²⁹ Ibid., p. 38.

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 38-9.

³¹ Ibid., p. 40.

the foreigner.³²

Wilfrid appealed a second time to Rome, and was again sustained, but this time he brought back not a papal edict, but the recommendation that the matter be settled by a synod in England.³³ Wilfrid lived only three years longer.

Theodore was a Greek monk, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, a scholar, a man with much experience, and had great sympathy, naturally, with the Eastern Churches. He was furthermore a man of stupendous energy and vision. He toured the country from place to place, organizing, directing, strengthening and correcting. He established schools and monasteries and from the chaos which had prevailed for several centuries, he gradually worked out an order and a system. Under Theodore it is possible for the first time to speak of the Church in Britain as a single Church, that is, of course, since the time of the Germanic invasion. From this period on it grew in the consciousness of its own unity, its own integral responsibility and felt itself one of the great units of Christendom. Wakeman's comments on this achievement follow:

³² Ibid., p. 45.

³³ Ibid., p. 46.

With the restoration and death of Wilfrid the story of the organization of the infant Church of England is complete. It is due mainly to two great men, Theodore and Wilfrid, and due as much to the disagreements which arose between them as to the individual capacity and energy of each. To Wilfrid belongs the credit of uniting the Church of England as a whole to the Western Church, and ensuring her progress along the path of civilization by the adoption of the Roman Easter.

To Theodore belonged, as was right, the organization of government. It was his work to introduce law, order, discipline, and subordination into the disorganized and inert mass of English Christianity. England was divided for purposes of administration into territorial bishoprics of an extent not too great for the energies of one man. The episcopate thus formed was duly subordinated to the metropolitan archbishop at Canterbury, not according to the caprice of a despot, but by the adoption of recognized principles of ecclesiastical law. The very troubles consequent on the quarrel between the archbishop and Wilfrid in the end served only to intensify the rule of law, for while all attempts on the part of Wilfrid or the pope to overturn the decisions and alter the policy of the national Church in the matter of its own territorial divisions were steadily repulsed, it was none the less clear that no archbishop or king would ever again attempt to interfere with the diocese of a bishop against his will. Thus by the quarrel itself the true principles of episcopal authority and national independence were brought into clearer prominence.³⁴

The roots which had been planted had put forth their shoots. Upon these shoots there had been made sev-

³⁴ Ibid., pp. 46 and 47.

eral grafts, each transmitting to the future tree its own particular weakness and strength.³⁵ Now there had come the skilled workman who recognized those elements which made for strength and carefully tended them, having at the same time the courage and the power to eliminate those offshoots or sports which might produce the wrong kind of fruit. Having in his lifetime tended the tree, he was able to hand on to his successors in office a sturdy growth, drawing its nourishment through various sources, combining all elements of early Christianity, but standing secure and strong in its own strength and independence. The Church of England had come into being.

³⁵ Collins, op. cit., p. 98.

CHAPTER VIII

THE SUMMARY.

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In 1930 the bishops assembled at the Lambeth Conference approved the following statement of the nature of the Anglican Communion:

The Anglican Communion is a fellowship, within the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, of those duly constituted Dioceses, Provinces or Regional Churches in communion with the See of Canterbury, which have the following characteristics in common:

- (a) they uphold and propagate the Catholic and Apostolic faith and order as they are generally set forth in the Book of Common Prayer as authorized in their several Churches;
- (b) they are particular or national Churches, and, as such, promote within each of their territories a national expression of Christian faith, life and worship; and
- (c) they are bound together not by a central legislative and executive authority, but by mutual loyalty sustained through the common counsel of the Bishops in conference.¹

It is almost as though there had been no interval of time, no conflicts with ecclesiastical powers demanding the authority to govern the world, no fight to wrest its right to independence of action and thought from the hands of a usurper since the Council of Hertford. (673) For

¹ The Report of the Lambeth Conference (New York: Macmillan Company, 1930), p. 55.

these words breathe the same conceptions of the relationship within the Catholic Church of national Churches, of the responsibilities and rights of national churches, as did the canons of that council.

We have seen in the course of this paper the various factors which preceded and which made possible and even necessary the final steps that were taken to unite the Celtic, Scottish and Roman parties into a single Church. It is true that in such a process each side has to yield some points, but also it is even more true that each side must add some strength, some quality to the union so that the resulting whole is greater in quality than were either of the parts before they joined.

Of this there can be no question as these Churches moved together. To the saintly fervor of the Celtic monk was added the contact with the western world. To the ability to govern and administer which belonged especially to the Roman world was added the learning and the devotion to duty of the disciples of Columba. To the broad vision of the administration of a world-wide Church which was glimpsed by the Pope, there was added the consciousness of the need of personal contact between the bishop and his people that resulted from the Celtic tribal organization of the Church. And to the missionary enthusiasm which kept alive the Christian religion in the days

of disaster following the Germanic invasion, the Romans were able to bring to bear their knowledge of how the Church had spread her rays among other peoples of the world.

Each needed the other. And when they had once been united they formed a union that was to persist through other and even more disastrous emergencies. Again and again must the Church of England withstand attacks against it. It must still repel the attacks of heathenism, launched by the invasion of the Danes. It must fight its way through attempt after attempt to subdue it to a foreign power. Sometimes it would appear as though the battle had been lost, and yet in the end she was to re-win her freedom, but then only to find that once more she was fighting for her life against those within her fold who were eager and anxious to cast aside the hard-won heritage of her past for present expediency.

And yet, in 1930 she still stood: an old tree now, but a strong one. Her roots had gone deeply into the lives of men and her branches spread out to all the world. Within her compass were found men of all races, colors and languages. Her prayers and liturgies were said in many tongues. And still she was true to the principles enunciated when she came into full possession of her powers. No part of this Church had dominion over another, each

was an equal fellowship in the one Catholic Church.

And worth noting is the fact that here and there appear marked instances that show that still within the Church are those same roots, supplying those different elements which were united when Celt and Scot, Anglo-Saxon and Roman joined hands to form the Church of England.

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